

IMAGE COMING SOON #1

Curated by Liora Belford
March 20–June 6, 2015

museumcircle (1989–1995) by John Cage with Art Gallery of Ontario, Blackwood Gallery, Campbell House, City of Toronto Museums & Heritage Services (Colborne Lodge Museum, Fort York National Historic Site, Gibson House Museum, City of Toronto Historical Collection, The Market Gallery, Spadina Museum, Todmorden Mills Heritage Site, York Museum), Design Exchange, Doris McCarthy Gallery, Gardiner Museum, Gendai Gallery, Hart House Collection, Museum of Inuit Art, The Morris and Sally Justein Heritage Museum at Baycrest, Malcove Collection, Mercer Union, Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art, MZTV Museum of Television, Open Studio, Ontario Science Centre, Royal Ontario Museum, Ryerson Image Centre, University College Collection, University of Toronto Collection.

Erratum Musicale (1913) by Marcel Duchamp with Ido Govrin, Martin Arnold, Ryan Driver, Doug Tielli, Christine Duncan, Michael Davidson and Patrick O'Reilly.

In 1989, the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (MoCA) invited the American composer and artist John Cage to create a new artwork based on his life. Cage, who wasn't interested in a show whose subject matter revolved around his autobiography, instead created a four-movement "composition for museum" entitled *Rolywholyover A Circus*. The composition, as conceptualized by Cage, was executed after his death in 1992 by MoCA curator Julie Lazar, and travelled between 1993 and 1995 from Los Angeles to Houston, Philadelphia, New York, and Mito, Japan. According to Lazar, one of the composition's four movements, the *museumcircle*, was informed by *Erratum Musicale* (1913)—the first musical work of the French-American artist Marcel Duchamp—and as such, demonstrates the potential of performing a musical score as a curatorial method for displaying objects in space. *Erratum Musicale* is a

chance-based score for three voices; following Duchamp, Cage composed a sculptural space that included art, artifacts, chairs, rocks, books, and chess tables. *Image Coming Soon #1* juxtaposes *museumcircle* by Cage and *Erratum Musicale* by Duchamp in order to compare the two scores, and more specifically, to contemplate the consequences of Cage's spatial adaptation of Duchamp's sound.

Erratum Musicale (1913) by Marcel Duchamp

Erratum Musicale is the first of only two musical compositions that Marcel Duchamp created, in addition to one conceptual sound piece.

Along with other projects in a series from 1913, *Erratum Musicale* threw into question the concept of the work of art. In an interview Arturo Schwarz conducted with Duchamp for his book *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp* (1969), the artist reveals that around the end of 1912 he began having doubts concerning the concept of the work of

art, which led him to create a variety of projects dealing with what he called the "beauty of indifference."¹ These doubts brought about the first readymade the following year—a bicycle wheel on a kitchen stool (*Bicycle Wheel*, 1913)—and along with it, the declaration that it was the artist's power of selection and choice that turned any object into a work of art. Another project from the same year was 3 *standard stoppages*, in which the artist used chance to explore the *idea* of a metre. In this work, Duchamp threw three metre-length threads, each onto a separate rectangular canvas, which he later painted and announced as a new unit of measure, Duchamp's metre. The three chance-derived shapes were also used by the artist to create three "standard stoppages," carved from three wooden metre sticks. But his work with chance didn't start with 3 *standard stoppages*; according to Schwarz it was with *Erratum Musicale* that Duchamp first exploited chance in his practice, applying it to the temporal dimension rather than to the spatial.

Duchamp wrote *Erratum Musicale* for three voices, his two sisters and himself, and titled each part after their names: Yvonne, Magdeleine, Marcel. The three voices are written out separately, and there is no

indication whether they should be performed individually or together as a trio. In composing this piece, Duchamp made three sets of 25 cards, one for each voice, with a single note per card. Each set of cards was mixed in a hat, then he drew the cards one at a time and wrote down the series of notes in the order in which they were drawn. *Erratum Musicale* embodied the same ideas as 3 *standard stoppages* or *Bicycle Wheel*, but this time examining the composer's role. As such, the theory behind *Erratum Musicale*, according to Schwarz, owed to Lewis Carroll's guide for becoming a poet in *Poeta Fit, Non Nascitur* (1869): "For first you write a sentence/And then you chop it small;/Then mix the bits, and sort them out/Just as they chance to fall;/The order of the phrases makes,/No difference at all."² The title of Carroll's poem is a play on the Latin proverb *poeta nascitur, non fit*, which means "a poet is born, not made." By inverting it, Carroll counters that a poet is made, not born. Duchamp takes it from there, and as he chops the notes and words for *Erratum Musicale*, he alters the concept and process of being a composer.

Duchamp's musical works represent a radical departure from anything done up until that time in music, most notably because they showed that you did not need to be a composer to compose music. His three musical works are considered difficult material to work with, for there are very few comments or explanations by the artist to assist with resolving the pieces. As such, they can be considered precedents to the Fluxus pieces of the early 1960s, where works combine unknown factors and elements, explained and unexplained. The Czech-American composer and conductor Petr Kotik explained in his preparatory notes toward the performance of Duchamp's second composition that "a realization of such a piece can result in an event/happening, rather than a performance."³ The lack of instructions in Duchamp's musical score, as Kotik suggests, forces a process of interpretation, which later can result in a performance that embraces improvisation. The performance of Duchamp's randomly ordered notes and textual repetition allows the process of composition to be both heard and seen. It therefore uses sound to construct a visual space in what seems

analogous to an abstract experience of a sculptural space. This spatial realization of sound was far ahead of its time, even provoking a scandal, according to the French Dada artist Georges Ribemont-Dessaigne, who acted as the page-turner for the first public performance of *Erratum Musicale*. The performance took place at the "Dada demonstration" on March 27, 1920, in the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre in Paris, and Ribemont-Dessaigne "was overwhelmed by an unprecedented din that was made up of this terribly dissonant music, and the restlessness, shouts, and whistling of the audience, all of which united with a crash of broken glass to give a truly most curious effect."⁴

museumcircle (1989-1995) by John Cage

museumcircle, one of the four movements in Cage's composition for museum *Rolywholyover A Circus*, was performed for the first time in Munich in 1991 at the Staatsgalerie Moderne Kunst, as part of Cage's preparations for the show at MoCA.⁵ Between 1993 to 1995, while *Rolywholyover A Circus* toured various institutions, *museumcircle* appeared in a new iteration each time. According to Lazar, "Cage acknowledged *Erratum Musicale* as a source for his idea for *museumcircle* and for how it would operate."⁶ Following Duchamp's usage of found words from a dictionary, Cage created a pool of found objects by sending an open call to all public lending institutions (fine art, natural science, natural history, aerospace, anthropology, et cetera) within a radius of thirty miles from each host city, inviting them to submit a list of ten objects from their collection. One object from each list was then selected according to a list of numbers created by Cage's computerized I-Ching program, named IC. The list consists of 640 randomly repeating numbers between one and ten and chosen by chance-operations; the object from the museum's lists is then selected according to the order of their arrival. For example, if the first item in the IC list is the number two, then object number two is selected from the list of ten objects that is first to arrive. If the second item in the IC list is the number five, then object number five is selected from the list of objects that arrives second, and

so on. These objects, together with scores, rocks, plants, shelves with reference books similar to those found in Cage's private library, chess tables, and pieces of ephemera constitute the elements of *museumcircle*. Again following Duchamp's chance methodology for *Erratum Musicale*, each object was numbered, as was each potential placement in the spatial grid (which Cage designed together with the museum registrar). These numbers were later pulled by the museum staff from two "hats" (in fact, cardboard boxes), one for the objects and the second for the spatial grid of the gallery.

Unlike Duchamp's composition, Cage's composition for museum did not aim to be provocative or critical regarding the institution of art and, accordingly, the spatial grid was conceived with utmost respect to the objects on display. For instance, objects were not to be hung too low where they might be mistakenly damaged, or hung upside down or backwards. While the participating institutions were listed in the accompanying box composition publication (which needed to be printed prior to the tour), the selected objects were not. Moreover, no labels were placed beside the objects, though they were numbered (and an enumerated list of all the objects on display was available in each gallery). This label omission might be read as an agitative act, but according to Lazar it was decided by Cage, together with key museum staff, after realizing the extreme height at which some pieces were to be hung and the proximity of some hangings. According to Lazar, it was Cage's ongoing interest in "collage," both in sound and visual art, that led him to situate "high art" along with ephemera and non-art objects. She further argues that this, along with a desire to reject of authorship, was the main impetus behind *museumcircle*.

In many ways, *Rolywholyover A Circus*, and the *museumcircle* movement in particular, was Cage's most ambitious and most successful project in achieving a critical break between the artist's ego and the work itself, a break previously described by Duchamp in "The Creative Act" (1957). In this text, Duchamp describes the role of the spectator in the encounter with a work of art as the revival of the creative act, what he

called the "art coefficient." In *Erratum Musicale*, the performer created his own interpretation of the musical score, which was later interpreted, by the spectator, as an abstract musical sculpture. In contrast, in *museumcircle* we witness Cage redefining the creative act, pushing at its limits via his interpretation of Duchamp's musical work. Cage created a spatial composition to be completed by the spectators, whose activities—such as moving chairs, opening drawers, playing chess, talking, and touching—produced sounds and thereby became part of a musical experience. In another movement, the *Main Circus*, Cage empowered the gallery installers as performers by instructing them to move some of the works on display during opening hours, according to a chance-operation computerized score.

In her essay "John Cage and Investiture: Unmanning the system," Julia Robinson suggests that Cage's redefinition of the creative act was part of his strategy of "self-authorizing," a process through which he aimed to operate beyond the limits of musical discourse, and that initiated his model of "Experimental Composition." This, according to Robinson, was part of Cage's effort to turn musical composition as intervention into a new discipline. "But," she states, "it was the composer-performer-audience basis of his own discipline [...] that first allowed him to contemplate the public register of the creative act."⁷ In *Rolywholyover A Circus*, Cage transformed the museum experience into musical experience by composing an exhibition as a circus-like event, and by doing so, adding the performative act to the creative act.

Explicit consideration of the form of the art exhibition was something Cage turned to later in his career, but a variety of circus-like events and compositions preceded *Rolywholyover A Circus*, including the *Happening at Black Mountain College* (1952), *Musircircus* (1967), *HPSCHD* (1969) and *Rorarorio, An Irish Circus on Finnegans Wake* (1979). Lazar states that "[i]n a Cage circus [...] there isn't a specific beginning, middle, or end—if you can't hear or see everything in the room, that's okay, you can at least see and hear *something* of interest."⁸ Cage's circus-like work provided a framework in which there is a plurality of centres which "are

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[1] Arturo Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969), 35.

[2] Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland: Through the Looking Glass and Other Comic Pieces* (Toronto: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1929), 225.

[4] Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, *Déjà Jadis; ou, Du mouvement Dada à l'espace abstrait* (Paris: René Julliard, 1958), 70-1.

[5] Very little is documented from this first trial and most of the information below was provided by Julie Lazar, or found in the archival materials in the Cage Trust.

[6] Julie Lazar, e-mail message to author, July 8, 2014.

[3] Petr Kotik, "The Music of Marcel Duchamp," liner notes *Music of Marcel Duchamp*, (London: Edition Block and Paula Cooper Gallery, 1991).

[7] Julia Robinson, "John Cage and Investiture: Unmanning the system," *The Anarchy of Silence: John Cage and Experimental Art* (Barcelona: MACBA, 2010), 56.

[8] Julie Lazar, "nothingtoseeness," *Rolywholyover A Circus*, (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art; New York: Rizzoli International Publications, c1993).

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Gallery Hours
Tuesday to Saturday 12–5pm
Wednesday 12–8pm
Sunday and Monday closed
The gallery is wheelchair accessible.
Admission is FREE.

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The exhibition includes unannounced performances of *Erratum Musicale* (1913) by Marcel Duchamp. Performers include: Ido Govrin, Martin Arnold, Ryan Driver, Doug Tielli, Christine Duncan, Michael Davidson, and Patrick O'Reilly.

Opening Reception
Friday, March 20, 6:00–8:00 pm.
Shared Opening Reception with the MVS Studio Graduating Exhibition at the University of Toronto Art Centre.

ARTbus Tour
Sunday, March 29, 12:00–5:00 pm.
Tour to the Justina M. Barnicke Gallery, University of Toronto Art Centre, Art Gallery of Mississauga, and Oakville Galleries
\$10 donation. For reservations, contact artbus@oakvillegalleries.com or 905-844-4402, ext. 24 by Friday 27 March, 4:00 pm.



Conversation and Panel Discussion
Wednesday, May 6, 5:00 pm.
Show and Tell: Institutions talk about the objects.

Performance
Wednesday, June 3, 7:30 pm.
45' for a Speaker (1954) by John Cage. Performer Martin Arnold.

Curator's Acknowledgements
All the information regarding *Rolywholyover A Circus*, if not noted differently, was provided to me by Julie Lazar, whom I interviewed and whom I would like to thank dearly for her tremendous help. I would also like to acknowledge the help of the marvellous Laura Kuhn, director of the John Cage Trust, who gave me free access to the twelve treasure boxes with archival materials of *Rolywholyover A Circus*. My most sincere gratitude and appreciation goes out to Barbara Fischer; for her guidance, kindness and ideas, she has been invaluable to my project. I would also like to thank Amnon Wolman, David Grubbs, Adi Luria Hayon, Sarah Robayo Sheridan, Martin Arnold, and Marcin Kedzior for our inspirational conversations about John Cage, sound, and space; and to AnTe Liu, Julian Haladyn, Malcolm Sutton, and Gina Badger for their part in shaping my abstract ideas into words. My deepest gratitude for their professionalism as well as for their friendship goes out to Emy Martin from The John Cage Trust and the staff of the Justina M. Barnicke Gallery and University of Toronto Art Centre, Rebecca Gimmi, Christopher Régimbal, Heather Darling Pigat, Daniella Sanader, and Emily Fitzpatrick. And to the participating institutions, for being part of Toronto's landscape as it comes out from John Cage's *museumcircle*. Lastly, to my family, my other half, and our two wonderful girls, for your love, patience and support, that make all the hard work seem worth it—thank you, it is all due to you.

This exhibition is produced as part of the requirements for the MVS degree in Curatorial Studies at the University of Toronto.

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interpenetrating and, as Zen [Buddhism] would add, non-obstructing.”⁹
Cage was influenced by the “whispered truths,” which are three principle tenets from one school of Zen Buddhism. They include: “[Y]our action should be as though you were writing on water [...] In other words, not to make an impression.”¹⁰ The use of chance-operations in his composition for museum freed the composer-curator from using personal taste and created a space of free interpretation; everything was allowed, nothing was important. This, I believe, cultivated patience and tolerance in the spectator's exhibition experience.

Chance-Operations
When Cage was asked by Moira and William Roth about the differences between Duchamp's idea of chance and his own, he referred to *Erratum Musicale*, saying that he wouldn't be satisfied with pulling notes out of a hat, but that he was delighted with it in Duchamp's work. As such, Cage indicated that he preferred his version of chance to be more intricate, but, according to him, that wasn't the main difference in their perspectives: “I think that the difference between our attitudes to chance probably came from the fact that he was involved with ideas through seeing, and I was involved through hearing.”¹¹ Cage goes on to define Duchamp's use of chance as a form of translation, based in language, in contrast to his own goal, which is “to set a process going that is not related to anything.”¹² Consequently, the open call for the city's public lending institutions to submit a list of ten objects is the main difference between *museumcircle's* and *Erratum Musicale's* chance methodology. While Cage used chance to create his pool of objects, Duchamp used chance only as a method of *selection*. While the former opened his score to include any object, the latter closed off outside possibilities by determining the notes and words that were used. In other words, Cage used chance to conduct an unpredictable process that would surprise first of all himself, and Duchamp, as a conceptual artist, used chance as a translation tool in turning his ideas to conceptual objects.

Sophie Stévance rightfully crowns Duchamp as the inventor of what she calls “conceptual music.” In her essay “John Cage Tunes Into the Redefinition of the Musical Field by Marcel Duchamp and the Emergence of a Conceptual Music,” Stévance states that through his compositions, Duchamp offered an experience in which the truth of music no longer depended on its acoustic dimension, but rather on its conceptual dimension; music becomes an object that leads to listening as thought. Duchamp's music might be “useless performance in any case,”¹³ as he himself suggested, but from an epistemological stance, his compositions, similar to other objects he worked with (such as the urinal), should be valued for the ideas they hold. In other words, Duchamp the composer showed that music could function on another level besides sound, one in which it does not necessarily need to be played. This observation is crucial to the understanding of *museumcircle* as Cage's spatial adaptation of *Erratum Musicale's* conceptual sound, and accordingly, supports the argument that Cage's composition confronts the role of the curator. However, I maintain that by using his own chance methodology, Cage managed to avoid the snare of imitation. Moreover, by transforming Duchamp's musical composition to a spatial composition, Cage managed to exceed simply being provocative and composed a process-based exhibition that holds the offer “to get yourself in such a state of confusion that you think that a sound is not something to hear but rather something to look at.”¹⁴

Composition for Museum—Rolywholyover A Circus
The word *Rolywholyover*, which was coined by the Irish novelist and poet James Joyce in *Finnegans Wake* (1939), was chosen by Cage to characterize his exhibition as a celebration of dynamism and change. This implied, firstly, that *Rolywholyover A Circus* was a performative event. Hundreds of artifacts, plants, rocks, and pieces of ephemera were subjected to a chance-derived computerized score in which the displayed objects were referred to only by number. In one of the movements, the *Main Circus*, visitors could see a computer printing out generated

changes, which in turn were translated to works being hung on the walls and taken down, during opening hours, by gallery installers. In another movement, the *museumcircle*, visitors could play chess, read books, and enjoy other life-like experiences in the gallery. Moreover, it was the use of Cage's circus-like structure that ensured his exhibition was, instead of a conceptual object made by one person, a conceptual process that engulfed the spectators and made them, unintentionally, part of a group that set it in motion. As such, the structure of his composition for museum can relate to what Richard Kostelanetz defines in *The Theatre of Mixed Means* (1968) as “pure happening,” for it “provides neither a focus for one's attention nor sense of duration; and the performance envelopes the audience.”¹⁵ This happening's setting is much different from the other happenings made by Cage (such as the *Happening at Black Mountain College*), and from what Kostelanetz defines as “staged happenings,” in which the audience is separated from the performers. Moreover, by using a score—which included chance-operation as well as instructions—to compose his exhibition, Cage applied the same ideas and methodology he used to compose his sound (and later his visual art). Accordingly, the composer/artist who allowed notes to be themselves treated objects in the same manner, while detaching their immediate relationship to authorship. Or, allowing copies and replicas to be incorporated in the *Main Circus* movement, following his understanding that in sound there is no such thing as an original note. Furthermore, as in his musical compositions, the background sounds intervene. In 4'33” (1952), the sounds made by the audience became an integral part of the supposedly silent experience; in *Rolywholyover A Circus*, Cage empowered the spectators and the installation crew as performers both of whom added sounds by interacting with the displayed objects. Therefore, I maintain that through Cage's engagement with the form of the art exhibition, he established the composer as curator, forming a new field of research in which the exhibition space itself functions as music, thereby altering the concept of exhibition-making.

—Liora Belford

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LIORA BELFORD

MARCH 20–
JUNE 6, 2015

MUSEUMCIRCLE
(1989-1995)
BY JOHN
CAGE

ERRATUM
MUSICALE
(1913)
BY MARCEL
DUCHAMP

OPENING
RECEPTION:
FRIDAY
MARCH 20
6–8 PM

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